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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5326
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1199
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9969
RUEHK/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4376
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1840
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3576
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0537
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7068
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4684
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0946
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0950
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0693
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2903
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0560
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001572

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/24/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL BM

SUBJECT: MIN KO NAING MARKS HIS BIRTHDAY IN JAIL

REF: A. RANGOON 1521

1B. RANGOON 1485

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Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Min Ko Naing's family marked his October 18 birthday in Rangoon while he and four other 88 Generation Student leaders remained in regime detention. GOB media railed against the 88 Generation Students "wear white" campaign protesting the detentions, while Mandalay authorities rushed funeral arrangements for Thet Win Aung, brother of student leader Pyone Cho, who recently died in prison. Authorities continue to interrogate the new detainees and have sent video recordings of the sessions to senior regime leaders. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Emboff visited the home of Min Ko Naing on October 18, to participate in the family's birthday function. Although Min Ko Naing remained under detention, over 150 persons, including NLD youth leaders, labor activist Su Su Nway, the Veteran Politicians group, and 88 Generation Students (88GS) leaders, turned up to show support for him and to encourage his family and supporters.

13. (C) Min Ko Naing's birthday marked the end of the "wear white" campaign organized by the 88GS leaders to show solidarity with political detainees (ref A). It was difficult to measure the success of the campaign because white shirts are part of the standard uniform for public school and civil servants. An 88GS leader told us the students deliberately chose white for the campaign to give people an alibi for their choice of dress, while still showing solidarity with the detainees. The students saw the campaign as a non-confrontational way to push the regime to release all political prisoners.

¶4. (SBU) The October 18 issue of the regime's English-language mouthpiece, "The New Light of Myanmar," attacked the "wear white" campaign, blaming VOA and BBC radio for publicizing it. The article accused the campaign organizers of exploiting the people and relying on external elements, while claiming that the 88GS deluded themselves that they had public support by choosing such a widely worn color.

¶5. (C) The 88GS leader found it significant that the NLM article focused on the "wear white" campaign, but did not mention the 88GS signature campaign, which has received even broader public support. Student leaders claim to have collected over 530,000 signatures. Meanwhile, NLD spokesperson U Myint Thein confirmed that, while the NLD has not officially asked its members to cooperate, individual NLD members have joined voluntarily to gather signatures around the country. The NLD welcomes the campaign's goal of exerting pressure on the regime to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. The NLD also believes the signature campaign helps energize the public and NLD members after a long stretch of quieter activity.

¶6. (C) Authorities arrested NLD volunteer Win Ko in early October in Letpadan, Bago Division, for successfully collecting signatures from an entire village in Monyo Township. According to Embassy sources in touch with local police, the detention was particularly unusual because members of the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), the government's mass mobilization organization, not police, arrested him. A Letpadan court sentenced him to three years in prison on unsubstantiated charges of participation in an illegal lottery and disrupting a civil servant. Win Ko was not allowed any legal representation during the trial.

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¶7. (C) Ko Ko Gyi's senior aide told emboff on October 23 that the 88GS's next planned activity is a day of prayer on November 29. The students plan to contact representatives of all religions in Burma and ask them to pray together on November 29 for the release of all political prisoners and the beginning of a national reconciliation process. All who participate in the prayer protest will be asked to wear white and hold candles. One group plans to march with candles to Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon in the morning of November 29, with others simultaneously praying at other sites.

¶8. (C) According to another 88GS leader, eight people, including 88GS members and relatives of dead prisoner Thet Win Aung, flew to Mandalay on October 17 to organize his funeral. However, Mandalay prison officials made their own hasty funeral arrangements and obtained the parents' consent to hold the cremation on the same day, so the 88GS would not have time to organize a larger event. Nevertheless, according to media reports, over 300 people turned out to pay final respects to Thet Win Aung, who had been in prison for eight years and whose brother, Pyone Cho, was picked up on September 30 in the second wave of 88GS detentions. Thet Win Aung was 34 years old and is widely believed to have died from medical neglect.

¶9. (C) Authorities have repeatedly refused family members' requests to visit the recently detained five student leaders. Students believe Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, and Min Zay Yar are being held in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Interrogation Center at Kyeik Wein, near 8 Mile Junction in Rangoon. A Special Branch police officer told one 88GS leader that Min Ko Naing was refusing to respond to interrogators' questions unless officials explained why he and his colleagues were being detained. The police official also claimed that authorities are treating and feeding the detainees well. NLD and 88GS sources both reported that interrogation sessions with student leaders were being

videotaped and sent to the capital for senior SPDC officials to review.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: The regime continues to hold Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Htay Kywe, Min Zay Yar, and Pyone Cho without charge or explanation. However, the students they led are resilient, and continue to pursue peaceful ways to protest the detentions and maintain pressure on the regime to free them. Securing their freedom ought to be a key item on U/SYG Gambari's agenda for his next visit. END COMMENT.

VILLAROSA